

Second, I'm establishing an equal pay task force at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to ensure that our EEOC field staff have the full range of support they need to effectively investigate charges of pay discrimination.

Third, and perhaps most important, again today I renew my call to Congress to send the clear message that wage discrimination against women is just as unacceptable as discrimination based on race or ethnicity.

The best way to do that is by acting this year. Support legislation to strengthen existing wage discrimination laws. Support our equal pay initiative in next year's budget to provide \$10 million for EEOC efforts to help in wage discrimination and \$17 million for Secretary Herman's efforts to train women in nontraditional jobs, including those in high-tech fields.

Thirty-five years ago, when President Kennedy signed the Equal Pay Act—now more than 35 years ago—he said, I quote, “It adds to our laws another structure basic to democracy.” For over 7 years now, the Vice President and I have tried to build on that basic idea, to include more women in every aspect of our administration's life and to create more opportunities for all Americans, women and men equally. We have not succeeded in closing the pay gap. We need the help of Congress to do it. It is very, very important.

We all say we want to support work and family. We all say we want to open new doors of opportunity. Now's our chance, and we ought to take it.

I'd like to introduce now someone who knows about the equal pay challenge because she has lived with wage discrimination. She has fought against wage discrimination and, thankfully, she has won.

She came here from Baltimore today to tell her story. Ladies and gentlemen, Karen Simmons-Beathea.

[At this point, Ms. Simmons-Beathea, who was the plaintiff in an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission case against the Baltimore Cable Access Corp., Representatives Rosa L. DeLauro and Eleanor Holmes Norton, Senators Dianne Feinstein and Tom Harkin, and Secretary of Labor Alexis M. Herman made brief remarks.]

The President. I just wanted to say one final thing; some of the Members have alluded to it. But because of the way we introduced each other, seriatim, I don't think we adequately expressed our appreciation to Karen Simmons-Beathea, who really represents what this is all about, and I think we ought to give her another hand. *[Applause]*

And I will just leave you with this thought. There are a few issues that we're working on today that, unfortunately, tend to get cast in Washington, DC, in terms of a partisan divide. But out in the country, there isn't one. You know, when I was a young boy, I lived with a working grandfather and a working grandmother. I was raised by a working mother. Nobody has lived in one of these families for any period of time without having at least one encounter with some kind of problem we're talking about. And if it ever happens to you, especially when you are a child, you never get over it.

If you go out and talk to Americans around this country, Republicans and independents and Democrats will all tell you more or less the same thing about this issue. This is not a political or a partisan issue anywhere else. Now, you heard Eleanor Holmes Norton saying if somebody doesn't like our bills or they want to talk about the practical impact, well, we can talk about how to word the language and deal with the practical consequences. But whether we do something or not and whether what we do is meaningful or not is not a political or a partisan issue in America, and it shouldn't be here.

And if all of the people who have ever experienced anything like what Karen talked about today, would talk to all of the Members of Congress about it, we would get something done, something meaningful this year.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:20 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House.

Exchange With Reporters Following the Observance of Equal Pay Day

May 11, 2000

[The exchange was joined in progress.]

Forest Fires in Los Alamos, New Mexico

Q. —beyond the usual response which is low interest loans and to actually rebuild the community?

The President. First of all, we're examining all that now. We've got—I want to know what the facts are. The Forest Service for a very long time has had these controlled burns, but we have to look in to it to see what the real facts are and what the responsibility of the Government is. And the rule here ought to be the "do right" rule: Whatever the right thing to do is, is exactly what should be done.

Right now we should be focusing on doing everything we can to minimize the damage of the fire and protect the lab assets, deal with the human problems, protect the lab assets. But as we look to rebuild, I think we ought to ascertain the facts and just do what the right thing to do is. That's going to be my policy. And I just don't know about the facts now to be absolutely sure, but as I do I will be for bending over backwards to do the right thing. That will be my policy.

Elia Gonzalez and Asylum Law

Q. Should Congress put into law whether a 6-year-old boy, or what age a child should be able to, of his own free will, seek asylum in the United States? Because, of course, it's not in the law right now.

The President. It's not in the law. Well, traditionally, the courts have ruled on these things based on the facts, and there have been certain presumptions about people who were above or below a certain age. And this decision, like others, has been governed by the assumption that a person below a certain age should be spoken for by a parent if the parent is a fit parent. Whether clarifying legislation will be needed, I think no one ever thought so before now. And I think we all ought to just sit and see what the Court of Appeals says and what happens, and that court decision may clarify whether we need legislation or not.

Forest Fires in Los Alamos, New Mexico

Q. Have you now been assured that the laboratory is safe?

Q. Are you going to march on Sunday?

The President. Well, they've taken extraordinary precautions. They've taken extraordinary precautions.

Am I going to what?

Million Mom March

Q. Are you going to march on Sunday?

The President. Well, I'm going to do something to support them. What I want to do is be supportive and do nothing to take away or distract from it. I'm going to do my best to help them. And we have a plan for a way that we—Hillary and I both want to be very supportive, and we will.

Gun Safety Legislation

Q. Do you believe that will motivate Congress—

The President. I don't know, but it ought to, because that's another one of those issues which is far less partisan out in the country than it is here in Washington. It's like this equal pay issue.

Q. —seeing all those women, all those people down there, will that motivate Congress to get this legislation through?

The President. It might or it might not. It depends upon whether the Members of Congress feel the human impact, which to me is the most powerful thing, and also realize that there are more and more people who care about this issue. It's becoming what I call a voting issue, because that's the thing that very often motivates Congressmen who feel torn, want to do something, but are afraid to do it because of the political implications. Most of the polls you see on issues don't mean anything to them, because the real issue is whether this issue affects how people vote.

And I think if a couple hundred thousand people show up here and several hundred thousand more at these sites around the country, it ought to send a signal that we want America to be a safe country and commonsense gun measures is a part of the strategy. And that, plus just the human impact of the stories, there's a chance it will break

through and help us break this logjam. I hope and pray that it will.

Q. Any suggestion——

The President. What?

Elian Gonzalez and Asylum Law

Q. Any suggestion as to when a child might be of his own free will?

The President. I want to wait. I may want to comment on that later, but I think we should, in all fairness, let the Court of Appeals issue their ruling, see what the state of the law is and then make some sort of judgment about whether legislation is required.

New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani

Q. Any reaction to the Giuliani news yesterday?

The President. Well, I wish him and his wife and their children well on the health front and on the domestic front. I think that's all there is—all anybody should want. People in public life have challenges and difficulties like people in other kinds of life do.

And I've always had a good personal relationship with Mayor Giuliani. It's not been affected by the fact that I think my wife would be a better Senator. And on this, I think everybody in New York and everybody in America ought to be rooting for the human side of this to work out. We should wish him well in his struggle over his illness. We should wish that family well. We should want the best for their children, and we should want some space for all of them, out of the glare of publicity, to work their family issues out. That's what I want, and I hope he gets it.

NOTE: The exchange began at 1:10 p.m. in the Rose Garden. In his remarks, the President referred to Mayor Giuliani's wife, Donna Hanover, and their children, Andrew and Caroline. The press release issued by the Office of the Press Secretary did not include the complete opening remarks of this exchange. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Proclamation 7306—National Equal Pay Day, 2000

May 11, 2000

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Long before President Kennedy signed into law the Equal Pay Act of 1963, women had proved their ability to contribute to America's labor market. During World War II, when labor shortages offered women an unprecedented opportunity to work outside the home, women excelled at jobs traditionally reserved for men. Yet, despite their enormous contribution to maintaining American production lines, women in the workforce were paid less than their male counterparts.

For most of our Nation's history, in fact, women have served within a sharply segregated workforce, enjoying fewer educational and training opportunities than men and struggling all too often to disprove confining stereotypes about their roles and capabilities. But throughout the decades, women of courage, energy, and determination have continued to enter the workforce and open doors of opportunity for succeeding generations. Today, more women are in the labor force than ever before; the female unemployment rate is at its lowest in more than 40 years; the poverty rate for households headed by women is the lowest ever recorded; and the pay gap has narrowed substantially since 1963.

Despite these gains, the battle for equal pay for women is far from over. Although 37 years have passed since the passage of the Equal Pay Act, the average woman today must still work an additional 17 weeks a year to earn what the average man earns. That pay gap grows wider as women grow older, and it is widest for women of color. African American women earn 64 cents for every dollar earned by white men, and Hispanic women earn just 55 cents. While some of